

July 17, 2023

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation  
254 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation  
254 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Cruz:

I write to express my concern over the proposal to amend the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2023 to include a provision altering the High Density (Slot) and Perimeter Rule perimeter at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). Any change to the perimeter rule leading to an increased volume of long-haul flights out of DCA would create real and serious concern over continued daily air service from regional airports to our nation's capital, including to state capitals such as Charleston, West Virginia.

As you know, when Congress established the Perimeter Rule at DCA in 1966, its reasoning rested on three points. First, the rule promotes safety and security at DCA and in the Washington airspace by limiting congestion and traffic. Second, it reduces noise pollution and other externalities borne by residents and businesses in the vicinity of DCA. Third, it supports the system of airports including Dulles International Airport and Baltimore-Washington International Marshall Airport that serves the nation's capital region. The intent behind the rule continues to be well-founded, just as it was when it was established. Furthermore, years of planning and strategic investment amount to millions of federal dollars have gone into the existing airport system over the decades since it was originally envisioned, including the recent addition of Silver Line metro service directly to Dulles International Airport, making it even more accessible to the region as a whole.

Changing the Perimeter Rule would come at the expense of small- and medium-sized communities within DCA's perimeter, including those in my home State of West Virginia. Its role in the Washington area's airport system allows DCA to serve regional airports with shorter flights and smaller aircraft, and non-stop flights beyond the perimeter are limited to federally-granted exemptions. Changing the perimeter would result in more long-haul flights due to the higher profit margins they command. DCA is a space-constrained airport; should the number of long-haul flights increase, other flights must be eliminated to make room. Indeed, the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority concluded that the flights mostly likely to be

eliminated in this scenario would be those serving small and middle-sized communities, stating that “smaller inside-perimeter cities – including some state capitals – would risk losing their nonstop air connection to DCA” should the proposed changes be enacted.

It is unacceptable to put the connectivity of countless communities to our nation’s capital at risk, simply because of the added to convenience to some Members of Congress who reside hundreds if not thousands of miles across the country. Regional airports are gateways to the world for many communities across our country, as well as being centers of commerce. The perfect example of this is West Virginia’s state capital, Charleston. One of West Virginia International Yeager Airport’s (CRW) most established routes is its daily service to DCA. CRW is the busiest commercial service airport in West Virginia by a considerable margin, responsible for 4,000 jobs and \$225 million in annual economic impact with a projected 200,000 enplanements this Fiscal Year. CRW plays a pivotal role in supporting West Virginia’s economic development as well as its transportation and tourism industries, and losing daily service to DCA would be devastating for CRW, its aviation partners, and to the State’s capital city.

In summary, I urge members of the Commerce, Transportation, and Science Committee to reject any amendment to the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2023 that would change the Perimeter Rule at DCA, given the adverse effects such a change would have on regional airports serving small- and medium-sized communities in West Virginia and across the country.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin III